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FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the reports of the Secretary-General, A/52/730 of 16 December 1997 and A/52/730/Add.2 of 20 February 1998, which contain the revised estimates for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. The first report (A/52/730) was submitted in response to Security Council resolution 1133 (1997) of 20 October 1997, which increased the size of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in order to proceed with the identification tasks. The second report (A/52/730/Add.2) follows Security Council resolution 1148 (1998) of 26 January 1998, which approved the deployment of the engineering unit required for demining activities and of the additional staff required to support the deployment of military personnel. During its consideration of the reports, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. During its hearings, the Committee sought additional information regarding the current cash situation of the Mission. In this connection, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Mission, currently in a deficit situation, had been forced to borrow $6 million in order to allow its operation. Moreover, the Committee notes that no reimbursement for troop costs has been made after the period ending 30 June 1996 and that an amount of $452,300 is estimated due for the period from 1 July 1996 through 31 January 1998, as indicated in paragraph 18 of the second report.

3. The financial background of the Mission since the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 51/2 B of 13 June 1997 is presented in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Secretary-General's second report. The letters of the Advisory Committee referred to therein are annexed below (annexes I and II). As indicated in paragraph 20 and annex I to the second report, the revised budget for MINURSO for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998 is estimated at

$47,402,100 gross ($44,419,700 net). This represents an increase of 56.8 per cent, or $17,172,300 in gross terms, over the resources approved for the same period by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/2 B. Of this revised amount, $13,097,700 gross ($11,946,500 net) is related to the resumption of the identification process and $4,074,600 gross ($4,042,800 net) relates to the engineering and demining operations, as approved by the Security Council in its resolution 1148 (1998).

4. The Advisory Committee notes that the additional requirements for the identification process contained in the second report (A/52/730/Add.2) show a decrease of $4,751,400 in gross terms over those presented by the Secretary-General in his first report (A/52/730). This is due to the vacancy situation indicated in paragraph 21 of the latest report and to the higher percentage of staff on appointments of limited duration. The Committee sought further clarification in this regard and was informed that, for the period from 1 July 1997 to 31 January 1998, the average vacancy rate for international staff stood at 14.5 per cent and that of local staff at 13.7 per cent, as a result of the staggered establishment and operation of the identification centres and delays in the implementation of identification activities. The Committee was also informed that, as at 31 January 1998, of the 268 authorized international staff, 202 were on board and that of the 95 authorized local staff, 72 were on board. Upon inquiry, regarding the breakdown of international staff by contractual status, the Committee was informed that of the 239 international staff on board as at 26 February 1998, 155 were under regular contracts (100 series) and 84 were under appointments of limited duration (300 series).

5. The Committee further notes that the revised staffing requirements for the period ending 30 June 1998 provide for a total civilian component of 390 personnel, including 285 international and 105 local staff - an increase of 183 international and 40 local staff. As indicated in paragraph 23 of the Secretary-General's second report, 176 international and 30 local staff are for the resumption of the identification process, while the request for 7 international and 10 local staff is related to the provision of support for the projected demining and engineering activities, as well as to meeting the logistical requirements of the Mission in preparation for the deployment of the formed military contingents. The details with regard to the latter are contained in paragraphs 9 to 11 of the second report. As indicated therein, those activities entail the construction of two base camps in the northern and southern sectors, the support of an additional medium-utility helicopter and the establishment of three mine information cells, one at headquarters and one in each sector.

6. The process of identification of applicants to vote in the referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara is being conducted in successive phases, with nine identification centres operating concurrently, each composed of two Identification Commission members, two registration officers and four General Service staff working in two teams. The centres are supported by Commission headquarters in Laayounne and three district offices established in the mission area. As at 19 February, eight identification teams were operating in the mission area (three in Western Sahara, two in the Tindouf area, two in southern Morocco and one in Mauritania), as indicated in the Secretary-General's letter to the Security Council of 19 February 1998 (S/1998/142). Moreover, it is

further indicated therein that between the resumption of the process, on 3 December 1997, and 18 February 1998, 42,484 persons had been convoked by the Commission and 30,425 had come before it for interview and identification, bringing the number of identified persons to 90,537 since the start in 1994.

7. The Committee was also informed that, at the request of the Government of Morocco, discussions are currently under way to open two additional centres in northern Morocco in view of the large number of applicants from non-contested groups residing in that part of the country who remain to be convoked. This would bring the number of identification centres to 11 instead of 9.

8. The actions to be taken by the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-second session in connection with the financing of MINURSO are contained in paragraph 27 of the Secretary-General's report (A/52/730/Add.2). The Advisory Committee recommends that the Assembly appropriate the proposed additional amount of $17,172,300 gross, which includes the $9,300,500 gross already authorized by the Advisory Committee, for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. The Advisory Committee also recommends approval of the assessment of $11,077,300 gross for the period ending 20 April 1998, as well as that of $6,095,000 gross for the period from 21 April to 30 June 1998, in accordance with the monthly requirements indicated in annex III.B of the report, should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of MINURSO beyond 20 April 1998.

9. The Advisory Committee draws the attention of the General Assembly to the fact that the financial performance report for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997 of MINURSO (A/52/730/Add.1) shows an unencumbered balance of $2,570,300 gross ($2,163,200 net). In that connection, the Committee will submit its comments and observations to the Assembly in a consolidated report on the financial performance of peacekeeping operations and the cost estimates for the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999.

ANNEX I

Letter dated 17 November 1997 from the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions addressed to the Secretary-General

The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the Controller's letter of 4 November 1997 requesting the Committee's concurrence to enter into commitments in the amount of $3,300,500 gross ($3,071,600 net) for the period from 1 November to 31 December 1997 to provide for the immediate requirements of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to enable it to proceed with its identification tasks. The request is being made under the terms of General Assembly resolution 49/233 A of 23 December 1994 on the administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

As recalled in the Controller's letter, the Security Council, by its resolution 1133 (1997) of 20 October 1997, extended the mandate of the Mission for a period of six months, from 21 October 1997 to 20 April 1998, and requested the Secretary-General to begin the identification of eligible voters in accordance with the Settlement Plan and the agreements reached between the parties with the aim of completing the process by 31 May 1998.

As also recalled in the letter, the General Assembly, by its resolution 51/2 B of 13 June 1997, had appropriated $30,229,800 gross ($28,430,400 net) for the maintenance of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. However, the appropriation did not provide for identification activities, which had been suspended in May 1996.

The Advisory Committee notes that the resources now requested would provide for the estimated non-recurrent costs of $1,231,300 for the emplacement of civilian personnel and the purchase of vehicles that are required for the operation of the identification centres. The estimate would also provide for the deployment of additional civilian personnel, consisting of 81 civilian police observers, 85 international and 30 local staff and 8 observers from the Organization of African Unity, as well as essential logistical requirements during the period from 1 November to 31 December 1997.

Pending submission to the General Assembly of a detailed report containing the revised budget for MINURSO, including full justification for the requirements, the Advisory Committee concurs in your request to enter into commitments in the amount of $3,300,500 gross ($3,071,600 net) for the period from 1 November to 31 December 1997.

(Signed) C. S. M. MSELLE
Chairman

ANNEX II

Letter dated 19 December 1997 from the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions addressed to the Secretary-General

The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the Controller's letter of 15 December 1997 requesting the Committee's concurrence to enter into commitments in the amount of $6,932,700 gross ($6,274,800 net) for the period from 1 January to 31 March 1998 to provide additional financial resources for the identification process, pending the consideration by the General Assembly of the revised budget for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The request is being made under the terms of General Assembly resolution 49/233 A of 23 December 1994 on the administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

As recalled by the Controller, the concurrence of the Advisory Committee was sought in a previous letter, dated 4 November 1997, to enter into commitments in the amount of $3,300,500 gross ($3,071,600 net) to provide for the essential and immediate requirements for the period from 1 November to 31 December 1997 in connection with the resumption of the identification process, including the deployment of 81 civilian police observers, 85 international and 30 local staff and 8 observers from the Organization of African Unity, as well as initial logistical requirements. The Advisory Committee concurred with this request in a letter conveyed on 17 November 1997.

The Advisory Committee notes that the commitment authority requested in the letter of 15 December 1997 includes non-recurrent costs of $320,000 for the purchase of communications and other equipment and that it provides for the deployment of an additional 91 international staff and essential logistical requirements in addition to the continuation of the staffing component mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

The Advisory Committee is of the opinion that the requirements submitted have been overestimated at present in anticipation of a decision by the Security Council. In view of an impending action by that body, in response to the Secretary-General's letter of 12 December 1997 (S/1997/974), and the possibility of revised requirements at the beginning of 1998, the Committee concurs with your request to enter into commitments, but at a level of $6 million gross, for the period from 1 January to 31 March 1998, pending submission to the General Assembly of a complete report containing the detailed budget for MINURSO, including full justification of those requirements.

(Signed) C. S. M. MSELLE
Chairman

ANNEX III

Provisional expenditure for the period from 1 July 1987 to 30 June 1998[a]

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	Allotment[b] (1 July 1997-20 April 1998)	Expenditure (1 July 1997-31 January 1998)	Unencumbered balance
Military personnel costs	6 018.4	4 158.3	1 860.1
Civilian personnel costs	15 203.4	6 216.0	8 987.4
Premises/accommodation	1 299.0	123.8	1 175.2
Infrastructure repairs	-	-	-
Transport operations	1 776.0	417.7	1 358.3
Air operations	4 860.7	3 198.0	1 662.7
Naval operations	-	-	-
Communications	415.3	405.7	9.6
Other equipment	469.4	182.3	287.1
Supplies and services	406.6	308.0	98.6
Election-related supplies and services	-	-	-
Public information programmes	-	-	-
Training programmes	-	-	-
Mine-clearing programmes	-	-	-
Assistance for disarmament and demobilization	-	-	-
Air and surface freight	27.6	27.6	-
United Nations Logistics Base, Brindisi	-	-	-
Support account for peacekeeping operations	903.8	903.8	-
Staff assessment	2 271.9	551.8	1 720.1
Total	33 652.1	16 493.0	17 159.1

[a] Appropriation of $30,229,800 gross.

[b] Includes commitment authority of $9.3 million gross provided for the period from 1 November 1997 to 31 March 1998.